

Town of Bloomfield
Economic Development Commission Meeting
800 Bloomfield Avenue, Conference Room #5
DRAFT MINUTES
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2015

Present: Jerry Long, Bonnie Bercowetz, Michele Bononi, Fred Hesketh, Rich McDermott and Jerry Katrichis.

Also present: Director of Planning and Economic Development José Giner, Mayor Joan Gamble, Deputy Mayor Syd Schulman, Councilman Joel Neuwirth, Dale Bertoldi, Rick Hughes, Mike Goman, David Driver, Rob Rowson and Don Poland.

Chairman Long called the meeting to order at 8:35am.

1. October 22, 2015 Minutes

Ms. Bononi made a motion to accept minutes of the October 22, 2015 meeting. Ms. Bercowetz seconded. The motion passed on a 4-0-2 vote with Mr. Long and Mr. Katrichis abstaining.

2. Update on Wintonbury Mall

José Giner reported that the only new news he had from the new owners was a request to consider a large increase in the allowable signage for the Mall. Mr. Giner said that he advised the owners that this was a large deviation from what is currently allowed and suggested that they provide a drawing and perspective of what the sign they had in mind might look like. It was Mr. Giner's opinion that the sign that was initially shown on one of the new owners' Las Vegas Strip properties would not be well received for the Town Center area. Mr. Giner reported that he and the Town manager had met with Mike Goman and that Mr. Goman was going to try to contact the new owners to advise them on the New England market and design sensibilities.

Mr. Goman stated that he had not yet met with the new owner and that he had been unsuccessful in touching base with him.

Ms. Bercowetz asked about tenantry in the mall. Mr. Goman replied that the owners had resumed collecting full rents under the terms of the existing leases a portion of which had not been collected during the time the Mall was undergoing liquidation. It was his feeling that they were going to lose some of the tenants that were already marginal. Rob Rowson stated that he was getting mixed feedback from the tenants and acknowledged that there were some underperforming tenants that may not be able to stay in the Mall.

Dave Driver mentioned that he and Mr. Giner had met with the new owner's appraiser and the Mall manager from Colliers. He said they were advised to bring forth their vision and plans for the mall going forward. Mr. Rowson noted that the new owners had little experience with the northeast region and that there may be a learning curve to contend with.

Mr. Katrichis stated that a tenant had told him that he had received notice that their lease was being terminated and replaced. Mr. Goman stated that he did not think that this was possible on a long-term lease.

Mr. Hesketh noted that one tenant had told him that he was now paying for his electricity where he wasn't before. Ms. Bercowetz stated that retail is usually triple-net where the tenant pays for utilities. She noted that the opticians were on a month to month lease and that they would be moving to the Geisler's Plaza.

Rob Rowson noted that the Mall management had approached some businesses in other plazas to see if there was any interest in moving to the Mall.

Mike Goman believed that the focus should be on attracting an anchor to the Mall that brings in a good number of daily trips. He noted that un-anchored malls are generally not successful.

3. Filley Park Update

Mr. Giner stated that work was continuing on Phase 1. The natural stone retaining walls and columns are about 80% complete. Eversource needs to move a switchbox before the final 15 (or so) feet of the walk can be completed. (A safe temporary walking surface will be provided.) The walls, pavers, and brick banding will be completed this fall. The Eversource work, plantings, and final restoration will occur in late winter/ early spring next year. The project is expected to be complete by May 1, 2016.

4. Staff and Commission Member Update on Various Topics of Interest

a. Niagara Bottling.

Mr. Giner stated that the property on Woodland Avenue was proceeding through the land use approval process with Wetlands scheduled for November 16 and the TPZ on November 19. Although they had not yet committed to coming to Bloomfield he was confident that there would be an announcement some time in December once the tax agreement was finalized by the Town Council.

b. Town Center Apartments

Mr. Giner reported that the Apartments had received Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency in October and that he anticipated an application for Site Plan to come in for the December TPZ meeting.

Chairman Long asked about the status of the house that had some historical significance. Dale Bertoldi stated they were looking to have the house dismantled by May 1. He was working with the University of Hartford architecture program to study and possibly re-construct the house elsewhere. He noted that the house was one of the few remaining 1930's pre-fabricated modernist houses. He said that the original house had been completely cloaked over by a new exterior. He explained the significance of the house.

c. Goman+York

Mr. Giner distributed copies of Goman+York's Annual Report.

Mike Goman stated that they would like to focus on the new Tax Increment Financing (TIF) legislation at a subsequent meeting.

Mr. Goman stated that they were finishing up the marketing materials and that their marketing person would be contacting the Town's website person to see how they could get some of the material on the web page. He also noted that they were reformatting their monthly report to be more in line with the deliverables identified in the Scope of Services.

Mr. Goman also stated that they were looking at lower Blue Hills Avenue and noted the opportunities presented by the old-drive-in movie theater site and the adjoining Deringer-Ney property that would soon be vacant.

Mr. Goman also stated that his firm was helping in the review of past studies and plans for the Library.

Ms. Bercowetz asked if there was any information on possible improvements at the Blue Hills Avenue and Cottage Grove intersection. Mr. Goman said that was part of what they were working on for recommendations.

Mr. Goman stated that he had met with the Town Manager and Mr. Giner and they were looking to ramp up Industrial Marketing efforts. His firm was putting together a Scope of Work to present to the Town.

Mr. Goman discussed the new TIF Legislation that took effect October 1. He stated that it gave a lot more flexibility for municipalities over the old TIF legislation.

Syd Schulman stated that the Town Council had at one time considered establishing a TIF on upper Blue Hills Avenue near Day Hill Road but ran into the State issues that hindered progress under the old statute.

Mr. Giner gave his perspective on the new TIF legislation and stated he thought it was worth looking into as another tool in the economic development bag.

Chairman Long suggested that we go ahead and schedule this for a more detailed discussion at a future meeting.

d. Other

Ms. Bononi stated that the Annual report was very good and that it was important that the EDC also receive the monthly reports that were being submitted with the invoice. She stated that she felt that the EDC could be a partner in helping getting the resources needed to bring forward some of the ideas that were being generated by G+Y and the Town's staff.

Ms. Bercowetz asked if there were any empty seats on the EDC and if there was any policy regarding absenteeism from meetings.

Chairman Long replied that we did not have a policy regarding absences and that he was not sure about any vacancies on the Commission.

Mr. Giner stated that he would try to clarify.

Ms. Bercowetz seemed to think that at one time there was some discussion about revising the by-laws but that nothing come of it.

Ms. Bononi noted that the by-laws call for election of officers at the meeting following the elections. She suggested that we add it to the next Agenda.

Mr. Hesketh asked if the EDC should request a meeting with the Land Use and Economic Development subcommittee of the Council to discuss next steps in economic development. Mr. Giner suggested a joint meeting when Mr. Goman was ready to present his more in-depth discussion of the new TIF legislation.

Ms. Bercowetz asked that the EDC members be put on the mailing list for the subcommittee agendas.

Mr. Giner said he would pass this along to the recording secretary.

Ms. Bercowetz inquired about the status of the Hooker Brewery and thought she had seen a report that they were going to stay in Bloomfield. Mr. Driver said that he had been trying to contact the owner but had none been able to connect yet. Ms. Bercowetz stated that they have been a stellar corporate citizen and hoped that they could find a way to stay in Bloomfield.

e. Meeting Dates for 2016

Mr. Giner passed out the suggested slit of meeting dates for the next Calendar year. The only conflict noted was Yom Kippur and National Election Day. Chairman Long suggested that those two meetings be moved to the following Tuesday. *Mr. Hesketh made a motion to adopt the 2016 schedule as presented with the two changes suggested by the Chair. Ms. Bononi seconded the motion which passed unanimously.*

The next EDC meeting will be on Tuesday, December 8 at 8:30 a.m. in Conference Room #5.

5. Adjournment

Ms. Bononi made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:42 a.m. Mr. McDermott seconded and the motion was passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

José Giner, AICP, Director of Planning and Economic Development